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SUBJECT: BULGARIA: MFA ON NATO EXPANSION, KOSOVO, RUSSIA  
AND BLACK SEA

REF: SOFIA 640

Classified By: DCM Alex Karagiannis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. MFA Security Policy Director Petio Petev stressed Bulgaria's support for MAP for Georgia and Ukraine and eventual NATO membership for all of the Western Balkans. While pessimistic on resolving differences between NATO and Russia, he was upbeat on Bulgaria's ability to contribute proactively to stability in the region. Bulgaria is promoting regional integration through its engagement with the Western Balkans and its participation in KFOR, EULEX and OSCE missions in Kosovo. Bulgaria has also agreed to train Kosovar diplomats (in addition to the Afghani diplomats its currently trains.) Bulgaria has completed a new interagency plan on Black Sea Security and will share it with us shortly. Petev expressed concern over Russia's actions in Georgia and its intransigence on CFE. Russia would prefer to see CFE shelved in lieu of a new arrangement that would force NATO to negotiate a new framework with Russia, one that Moscow would try to de-link from Georgia and Moldova. Bulgarian leaders are uncertain how NATO should proceed in engagement with Russia, but they did not support a Russian proposal for a meeting of NATO MFA Security Policy Directors, as an alternative to a meeting of Ambassadors. End Summary.

NATO EXPANSION EAST AND WEST WILL IMPROVE REGIONAL SECURITY

12. (C) In an October 24 meeting with EUR/CE Director Pierangelo and a follow-on session with Poloff, Petev noted the Bulgarian Parliament's ratification of the NATO accession treaties for Croatia and Albania, but he regretted that Macedonia was not among this group. The expansion of NATO and trans-Atlantic values to the west and east (Western Balkans, Ukraine and Georgia) is essential to unifying and securing the region. He expressed hope that Georgia and Ukraine would be offered MAP status at the next opportunity and that Montenegro and Bosnia would be close behind. Serbia, he said, should not be neglected. Bulgaria has urged Serbia to continue engagement with NATO through Partnership for Peace, and found the Serbians very receptive. Bulgaria and Serbia will soon sign an agreement on the exchange of classified information.

BULGARIA DOING ALL IT CAN TO SUPPORT KOSOVO

13. (C) The situation in Kosovo following independence has gone & smoother than we could have hoped,8 Petev said, a testament to the intense dialogue among NATO and EU partners leading up to the event. But the danger of instability

remains, he added. Bulgaria is prepared to do all it can to support the successful political and economic development of Kosovo. While the Bulgarian mission in Pristina is currently led by a Charge d'Affairs, this will be upgraded to an Ambassador &within a few months.<sup>8</sup> Bulgaria maintains 42 soldiers attached to a military engineering contingent at Camp Prizrin, as well as representation in the EULEX and OSCE missions. Beginning in 2009, Bulgaria will begin training Kosovar diplomats and is considering other forms of economic or political training and assistance.

#### RUSSIA MUTE ON US-BG JOINT TRAINING, ANGLING TO SHELVE CFE

¶4. (C) Asked about Russian reactions to the recently concluded largest-ever U.S.-Bulgaria Land Forces training exercises, Petev described a recent meeting he had in Moscow where his interlocutors complained at length about the missile defense installations in the Czech Republic and Poland, but did not mention the U.S. &bases<sup>8</sup> in Romania and Bulgaria once, even when discussing CFE. He mentioned his surprise at this, since in the past, Russian objections to the facilities and their &violations<sup>8</sup> to the CFE had been consistent and strenuous. Petev's opinion is that the lack of a Russian response to our highly publicized joint exercises was the result of two factors. First, the Russians never truly felt threatened by the joint facilities, but instead saw them as a chip to be played in the larger CFE game with NATO and the U.S. He believed the complaints about the bases would be trotted out again in future multilateral fora, but the Russians did not appear to view the facilities as an obstacle to bilateral relations. Second, he believed that the Russians were picking their battles and had made a

calculated decision to refrain from commenting on regional security issues too strenuously in the wake of the Georgia conflict.

¶5. (C) Petev expressed Bulgaria's concern over the impasse on CFE and was pessimistic that any negotiated solution could be reached in the near future. His view was that the Russians had no interest in saving the CFE and would rather force NATO to sit down with them to create new ground rules. Russia's strategy would be to use the OSCE Summit in Astana in 2010 to launch a new security dialog, hoping to gradually reach normalized relations with NATO and the EU and eventually a de facto acceptance of the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Petev said Bulgaria would follow the U.S. and NATO lead on CFE, but the Bulgarians were anxious to know how long NATO intended to continue to share CFE information with the Russians in the light of its non-compliance.

#### BULGARIA TO UNVEIL NEW BLACK SEA SECURITY STRATEGY

¶6. (C) After 18 months of consultations, Bulgaria is poised to release a new interagency Black Sea Security Strategy. The Council of Ministers approved this classified plan on October 9, but Petev said the MFA is anxious to share it with the embassy as soon as it is releasable (a process that could take three weeks to three months.) The new plan is &Navy-centric<sup>8</sup>, he said, and conforms to long-standing Embassy Sofia recommendations to focus efforts on improving cooperation among the Black Sea states that are also NATO members before trying to reach out to all littoral states. While he could not share details, Petev stressed that the new plan would be &more than talk<sup>8</sup> and a &real contribution to Black Sea security.<sup>8</sup>

¶7. (C) Comment: Traditionally Bulgaria has tended to go with the flow on NATO and EU policy in the region and rarely moved proactively or independently. We have steadily encouraged Bulgaria to take a more active role in regional security policy, particularly since it will soon no longer be among the newest NATO members. In small ways, the Bulgarians are now doing this. While resources remain an obstacle, Bulgaria is committed to integrating the Western Balkans into the EU and NATO, and is taking a serious look at what it can contribute to security in the Black Sea region. Its development of a new Black Sea strategy is remarkable since

the Bulgarians rarely produce unsolicited proposals on international security issues. Timely high-level discussions, especially a visit to Sofia, will support these new Bulgarian initiatives and ensure their efforts align fully with ours.

McEldowney